Shortage of potable and irrigation water

† *88. SHRI JANESHWAR MISHRA: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to stater

(a) whether it is a fact that various parts of the country are facing acute shortage of potable and irrigation water;

(b) whether it is also a fact that cleansing of various ponds, canals and rivers of the country has become a thing of the past;

(c) if so, whether Government would formulate any phased scheme in this regard; and

(d) if so, by when and the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF WATER RESOURCES (SHRI ARJUN CHAR AN SETHI); (a) to (d) Due to the deficient rain in the South-West monsoon, certain parts of Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan are facing drought like conditions. The storages in the important reservoirs in these states varies between 6% to 67% of average of last 10 years capacity.

Cleansing of ponds and canals by way of desilting is taken up as part of routine maintenance by the state Governments from their non-plan funds. Some of the states plan to improve the condition of the old tanks through externally aided schemes. A Centrally sponsored scheme for improvement of irrigation tanks in different part of the country has been formulated. Desilting of rivers is not considered as a techno-economically viable option for increasing their capacity.

Bilateral Free Trade Agreements with Neighbouring Countries

*89. SHRIMATI CHANDRESH KUMARI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have succeeded in entering into bilateral free trade agreements with neighbouring countries in

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

order to accelerate the pace of regional integration and economic growth in the region;

(b) if so, whether the move will strengthen trade relations and increase economic activity, etc. in our neighbourhood; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and if not, the steps taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) to (c) To strengthen economc ties amongst SAARC countries, an offer was made by the Prime Minister to all the SAARC member countries during the Colombo Summit in 1998 that India would be willing to enter into bilateral free trade agreements with them to accelerate the pace of trade liberalisation in the region.

Sri Lanka responded positively to this offer and a Free Trade Agreement was signed with Sri Lanka in New Delhi on 28th December, 1998. The Agreement provides for establishment of a Free Trade Area for the purpose of free movement of goods between the two countries through gradual elimination of tariffs on the movement of goods. The salient features of the Free Trade Agreement are as follows:—

1. The Agreement envisages phasing out of tariff on all products except for a limited number of items in the Negative List, over a period of time.

2. The Rules of Origin specify that domestic value addition requirement should be 35%. If the raw materiaMnputs are sourced from each other's country, the value addition in the exporting country has to be at least 25% within the overall limit of 35%. The criterion of "substantial transformation" has been provided in the Rules. The goods must undergo transformation at 4 digit level of the Harmonized System.

3. The Agreement provides for sufficient safeguards to protect the domestic industry. In particular, if the import of any product causes or threatens to cause serious injury to the domestic industry, the contracting parties can suspend provisionally without discrimination

the preferential treatment accorded to the product under the Agreement.

4. Further, the Agreement provides that the contracting parties shall be free to apply domestic legislation to restrict imports, in cases where prices are influenced by unfair trade practices like subsidies or dumping. Also, in the case of balance of payments difficulties, Contracting Parties may suspend provisionally the preferential treatment as to the quantity and value of merchandize permitted to be imported under the Agreement.

The FTA has been made operative by the issuance of Customs Notification on 1st March, 2000.

The FTA will accelerate the development of national economies, promote mutually beneficial bilateral trade and strengthen intra-regional economic cooperation.

Ropeway Service from Bhubaneswari Temple to Kamakhya

*90. DR. (SMT.) JOYASREE GOSWAMI MAHANTA: Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether any steps have been taken by Government to start ropeway service in the route of temple Bhubaneswari to Kamakhya and Kamakhya gate in Guwahati, which is regarded as a big centre of pilgrims among the people in and outside the country; and

(b) if so, the details thereof, and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND CULTURE (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR): (a) and (b) The Development of infrastructure including setting up of ropeway service at pilgrim centres, providing facilities to the visitors at these places, their upkeep and maintenance is primarily the responsibility of the State/ UT's Government concerned. However, Ministry of Tourism provides Central Financial Assistance for specific projects prioritized in consultation with the State/UT's Government every year. So far the State Government of Assam has not submitted any proposal for prioritization and for central financial assistance, for installation of ropeway services from Bhubaneswari temple to Kamakhya.